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AN  
ADDRESS  
TO  
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.



*The Aged Minister's Friend:*

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A D D R E S S

T O

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS;

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*R* E C O M M E N D I N G

The Establishment of a F U N D

F O R

Supporting or assisting their MINISTERS, when,  
either by Age or Infirmities, they are rendered  
unfit for the Duties of their Office.

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“ The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the  
“ ways of righteousness.” SOLOMON,

“ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these  
“ my brethren ye have done it unto me.” JESUS CHRIST,

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L O N D O N;

M D C C L X X V I I I,





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## ADVERTISEMENT.

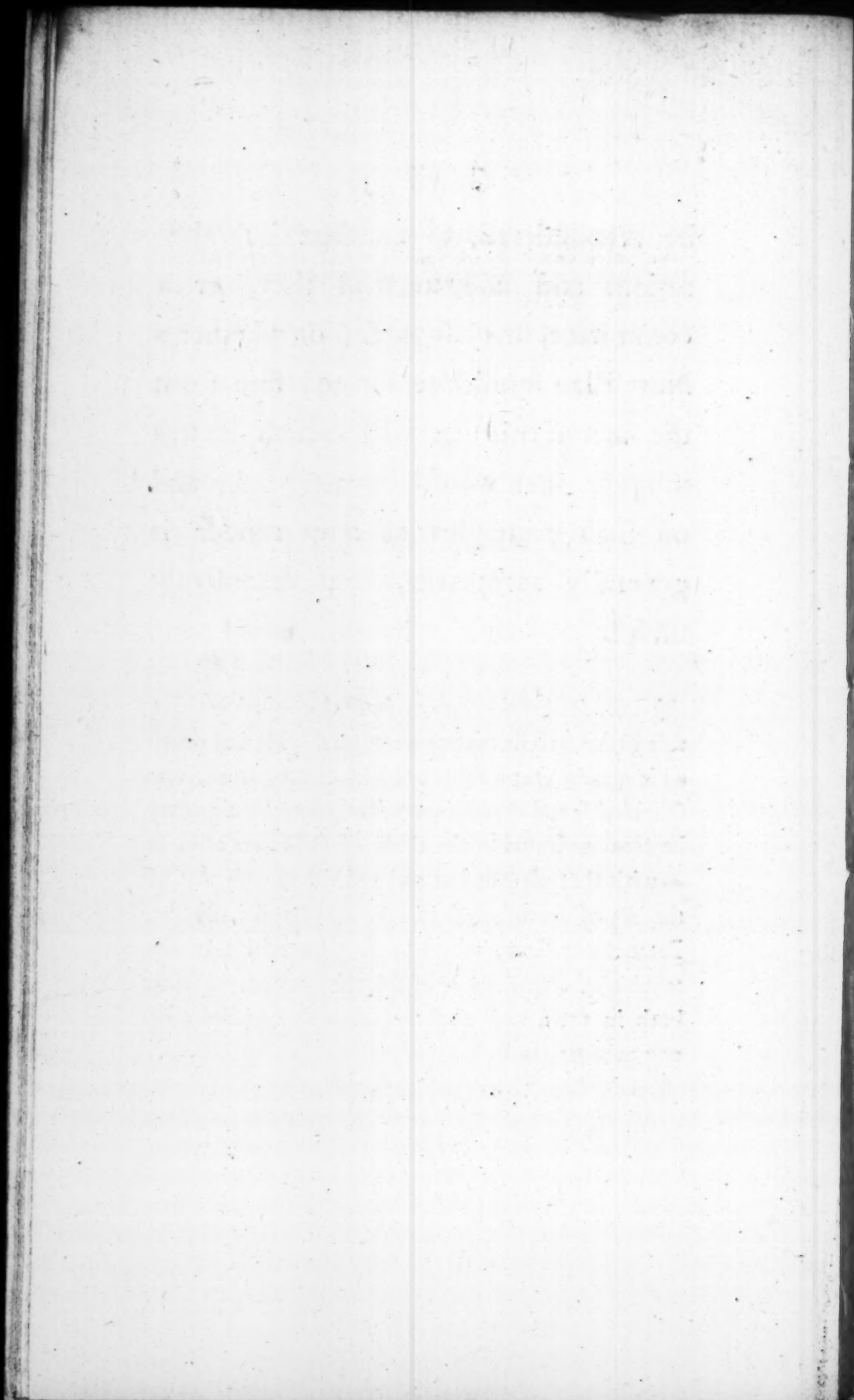
THE writer of the few following pages has heard, seen and thought much of the state of many of his aged brethren in the ministry: and of what they and their respective societies suffer for want of some seasonable and generous assistance at that period. The concern he felt, both for Ministers and People, induced him to transcribe some few hints of a Plan for their relief, which had occasionally occurred to him, in order to obtain the sentiments of wise and good men upon the sub-

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ject. Having weighed deliberately what many such have suggested, and attended to the probable operation and influence of such an undertaking on the dissenting interest, and that of real religion among us, he has thought it his duty to offer some general remarks upon it to the whole body of Dissenters. May he hope that the importance of the object, and his sincere intentions to serve it, will secure them a candid perusal. He has not ventured to propose particulars of a Plan. Has been favoured with a sight of that which was brought before the general body of Dissenting Ministers in and about London in the year 1771. He refers it to the wisdom and benevolence of that body whether that Plan

be reconsidered, to undergo such alterations and additions as they, or a committee, may suggest; or whether a New Plan should be formed free from the inconveniences with which it was thought that would be attended; and on such principles as may render it generally acceptable, and extensively useful.

N. B. The writer has no intention of advertizing this little tract in the public papers. He has printed it merely that a short account of the nature, reasonableness and expediency of the general design may be communicated to the Body of Dissenters at large—with that view he has ordered the greater part of the impression to be left at Mr. Buckland's, N<sup>o</sup> 57, Pater-noster-Row, where those who will take the trouble of dispersing it in their several connections, both in town and country, may be supplied with any number *gratis*.



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A D D R E S S , &amp;c.

**T**HOUGH the faithful Ministers of Religion may be treated with contempt by the sceptical and prophane, wise and good men will esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake; and consider those who, through the vicissitudes and labours of many years, have maintained an unblemished and exemplary character, as ornaments and blessings to the respective societies with which they are connected, and to the common interest they are appointed to serve: such will account themselves happy in every opportu-

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nity of contributing to their comfort and usefulness while continued in their work : and rejoice to lighten the burden of their labours and discouragements when grey hairs are upon them.

It has, nevertheless, been observed and lamented, that many Protestant Dissenting Ministers have continued in their stations when the infirmities of age have rendered their retirement, on several accounts, highly desirable.

This, it is apprehended, they are in some instances obliged to do, because they have no other means of subsistence than from the subscriptions of their people.

In some such cases, the numbers, finances, and religious interests of congregations are affected in a manner and to a degree equally discouraging both to them and their Ministers.



Nevertheless an affectionate and grateful people are very unwilling to withdraw their wonted assistance from Ministers honoured and beloved for their worthy characters and past services, when they know they must thereby be deprived of necessary support both for themselves and families.

Ministers, on the other hand, who have spent the best of their days and strength in the service, and have been long comfortably provided for, must feel very painfully, both for themselves and all dependent upon them, when reduced to the distressing dilemma of either injuring their people, or becoming burdensome to their nearest relatives and best friends.

When Ministers are totally laid aside, as some have been many years before their removal by death, there are few congregations that can raise an extra allowance for their support besides what they are obliged to do

for those who succeed them, and defray their other necessary expences.

Hence such Ministers become chargeable to their children or others, who, especially if they have growing families of their own, must subject themselves to great inconvenience, even to secure them from the ignominy and hardships of extreme poverty, and much more to provide for them a decent and comfortable subsistence.

But it seems dishonourable to any, and especially to so numerous and respectable a body as that of the Protestant Dissenters in England, to suffer their Ministers to be neglected in the decline of life, after having appeared long with credit and usefulness in their public character.

Plentiful provisions are made for those who have served their country in various other

departments, both civil and military, when they can serve it no longer.

All the three denominations of Protestant Dissenters have funds for granting exhibitions to those of their respective Ministers whose salaries are inadequate to their support, as long as they are capable of service.

A fund is established by the whole body of Protestant Dissenters for affording assistance to the widows of Ministers deceased.

Some Dissenting Ministers, in two or three different parts of the kingdom, have manifested their sense of the importance and utility of the general design here recommended, by attempting to make provision for aged Ministers in their own more immediate connections ; some on the plan of giving occasional benefactions at the discretion of the managers, and others on that of engaging for certain

annuities proportioned to the sums advanced by subscribers.—But no general adequate provision has hitherto been made by the body of Dissenters throughout the kingdom for those of their Ministers at large, whose age or infirmities render them unfit for the duties of their office. Yet it is not easy to conceive what some such suffer, while they feel bodily infirmities encreasing, their need of better support, and the fear of being soon deprived of the little they have—accompanied with the painful apprehensions which they cannot but at times entertain for their dear dependents: and all meeting upon them at a period when the grasshopper is a burden. These accumulated burdens and discouragements must often render them, both in the state of their bodies and in the frame of their minds, very unfit for their great work. Hints of this kind have suggested the reasonableness, the wisdom, and the expediency of making some provision for them.

Few if any designs, be their nature and tendency whatever they may, have escaped opposition. Perhaps no plan can be devised but may be liable to objections,—nor have there been many, if any, of the most benevolent and useful foundations, but, in some instances, have been misapplied and abused. But would any good man wish therefore that they had never been instituted? Inconveniences, it is said, have arisen from a part of the original constitution of the Widow's Fund: perhaps some improper objects have been admitted upon one or other of the funds for the assistance of Ministers in our several denominations. But we justly approve and support them as wise and beneficent institutions. And whether we apply the remark to schemes established or proposed, we may truly say it is rather an unhappy talent to be quick-sighted to objections and difficulties, and blind to the proper and effectual means of removing them.



It would be premature in the present early stage of this business, either to speak decisively on the general design, or to lay before the public the particulars of any plan for the execution of it. Thus much perhaps it may not be improper to suggest, that three general schemes have been mentioned by different Gentlemen.

1st. A benevolent plan throughout : on which every donation should be mere matter of favour ; and be given to such persons, at such times, and in such sums, as the managers, under proper regulations, shall direct.

2d. Wholly an annuity scheme : to which every one who has the benefit of it should subscribe, and from which he shall receive just so much as his subscription, either advanced in one sum or yearly, shall entitle him to, and no more, according to rules laid down for the calculation of annuities.—Such



a plan was under consideration of the general body of Dissenting Ministers in London about sixteen years ago; and is thought to have miscarried, partly, because few Ministers, who were most in need of its assistance, could spare the sums they were required to advance, in order to entitle them to a competent annuity; and partly, because those who could, might purchase annuities elsewhere upon more advantageous terms.

It is therefore proposed by some now, as a 3d Plan, to unite both—obliging every Minister, or his congregation for him, before he receive an exhibition, to subscribe annually, more or less, in aid of the charitable fund—but not to restrain the exhibition of such so as that they should receive nothing more than in exact proportion to their subscriptions, but more or less according to the state of the fund and their exigences.—Still leaving it open to such as

can and would subscribe sums sufficient to entitle them to a competent exhibition as annuitants.

This, it has been thought, would make both mutually subservient to each other. Charitable benefactions and subscriptions would be an additional security to the annuitants, and sums advanced for annuities might fall in by deaths of claimants so as to assist the charity.—Upon this plan it would perhaps be adviseable to offer no better terms to annuitants at first, than their subscriptions would entitle them to according to common calculations: but referring it to the managers to advance them hereafter or not, according to the state of their fund; as has been done by other annuity associations.

We might add, that some have recommended adopting both these schemes, but without uniting them—which would in effect be making two funds, though under the same

managers, viz. one for charitable objects, the other only for annuitants.

In one or other of these schemes, or in some not yet thought of, it is hoped a sufficient number of good men of all our denominations will unite, to afford seasonable assistance to our aged Ministers.—We say it is hoped—and may we not hope that they will? As the general design is of such extent and importance, and would, if properly adjusted and executed, prove a blessing to succeeding generations, it is by no means wished it should be precipitated. Every prudent precaution should undoubtedly be used in its arrangement; that the good ends proposed may be most effectually and permanently secured, and such inconveniences prevented as would interrupt or lessen its usefulness.

Yet it surely cannot be the part of wisdom, to discard this or any scheme truly

benevolent and much needed, merely because it could not be executed without attention, or even without some inconveniences.

“ But the Dissenters, we are told, are too much burdened already to attempt an undertaking of such magnitude.”—“ And, they are so heterogeneous a body, that no one scheme can be devised in which they will all unite.” Though these are the only plausible objections we have met with, it is obvious to remark of both, that they are by no means peculiar to this, but would apply equally to every benevolent design in which the concurrence of the body is of importance to the general good. As to the former, taken from the magnitude of the object, compared with present demands on the liberality of the body, it takes a very different ground from that on which the design has been attacked by those who imagine “ that we cannot have so many Ministers in the cir-

“circumstances supposed, as to need such a  
 “fund to support them.” But Gentlemen  
 who think thus, may not, perhaps, be very  
 accurately informed of their number. There  
 is reason to apprehend it will be found suf-  
 ficient to employ, and that very honourably  
 and usefully, the product of as much money  
 as could be expected, at least for some time,  
 from such an undertaking.

As to the burden of it upon the more gene-  
 rous and useful Dissenters, this appears to  
 have been a consideration that induced the  
 London Ministers, when the matter was be-  
 fore them some years ago, to prefer the an-  
 nuity scheme ; but resting the whole entirely  
 upon that, unhappily for many, the de-  
 sign miscarried. And if it should now be  
 thought adviseable to bring forward the bene-  
 volent part of the plan, in any form what-  
 soever, the writer of these pages is far  
 from entertaining the most distant desire



of imposing upon any a burden, which they are either unable or unwilling to bear. He is no stranger to the great and good things which numbers are doing for the support of their common cause, as well as the relief of many individuals. But he thinks himself obliged to declare that, on barely mentioning this design, without the least sollicitation, he has received very generous assurances of support from Gentlemen whose respectable characters and connections, he cannot but hope, would do it essential service. From such, however, as really believe they are doing, in this or that line of benevolence, already as much as justice to their more immediate connections will allow, nothing more should be expected. It is not wished that this scheme should be promoted either to the injury of families, or the discouragement of other institutions of equal utility and importance. Yet some perhaps may have queried, whether objections of this kind are most fre-



quently urged by those to whom the public is most indebted for their benefactions, or by such as fear being losers themselves by what this or that friend may be called upon to do for others. However that be, it is desirable this institution may be established on a plan that may secure such numbers of subscribers as would lessen the burden to individuals; and this would probably be the case, if very large subscriptions, &c. are not required of persons who wish to become members, and if no Ministers are allowed either to recommend to the fund, or to receive from it, but such as have contributed to it themselves. Though should it be thought necessary or prudent to retrench some expences, either public or private, there are those among us, we doubt not, who would chearfully submit to that inconvenience, rather than refuse to concur in a design so friendly to the dissenting interest at large, as well as compassionate to many of its

respectable and useful Members and Ministers. There are few of us but with some little attention and forethought might, if necessary, save out of sundry articles of extra expences, as much annually as it could reasonably be expected we should contribute to this fund : and we must be singularly ignorant of the doctrine of Providence taught in the scriptures in general, as well as inattentive to many express promises made by Jesus to acts of beneficence done to his servants in particular, if we could suppose they would lose their reward.

As to the other difficulty, arising from the diversity of our sentiments, it is said, that we can never all concur in any one scheme for the benefit of the whole. If you propose a plan for uniting the whole body of Protestant Dissenters in a design of this nature, one will say it is too narrow—another, it is too comprehensive.—One, it takes in objects it should exclude ;—another, it excludes those

it should admit. And it would certainly betray great ignorance of human nature, to expect the concurrence of every individual: but would it not be equally irrational to decline this or any benevolent undertaking, because so universal a co-operation is not to be obtained? As to this now before us, shall we think of it again? Is it a design to introduce men into the office, and support them in the work, of the christian ministry? No, it is merely to afford relief to those in dependent circumstances who can continue in it no longer. The only question here therefore concerning each is simply this, Is he necessitous and deserving? If that is not the line, let us look into our New Testament, and see if, in a case of this nature, it prescribes a better. Some may perhaps doubt, whether that authorizes us to confine it within those limits.—There may be (shall we call them?) political reasons for keeping up the distinct denominations of Presbyterian, Congregational and Antipædo-

baptists Dissenters, especially in and about London, but there can be none to justify any or either of these denominations, in confining his compassion and benevolence to those whom, in that sense, he distinguishes as his brethren. As to the other names by which the peculiar tenets of this or that man are marked in each, whatever I might think of them in many other cases—I cannot suffer them to influence me here. He has his opinions and I have mine. He is distressed now—I may be in trouble soon. I send to a neighbouring Minister of his sentiments—tell him my difficulties, solicit his pity and aid : he sends me word, no, I will do nothing for you—you are an ———ist, or an ———ian ; what should I think ? how should I feel ? perhaps my great Master’s rule would occur to me then ; let me not forget it now, “ All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.”

I have my religious sentiments, and hold them sacred. Shall I be allowed to say more? There are persons among Dissenters, as well as in the established church, whose principles appear to me very inconsistent with revealed truth, and subversive of it. Such probably I should not think of receiving to the intimacies of a distinguished and confidential friendship. I should not perhaps expect to see them in my pulpit, or attend often upon their preaching in their own. But all now asked of me, is to stretch out a friendly hand to uphold such an one among many others, who are of sentiments I cordially approve, from sinking into the depths of necessity and sorrow, when he can preach no longer.— And while I can recollect the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan, and many similar instructions from Jesus and his inspired Apostles, God forbid I should harden my heart, or shut my hand when called upon to administer what little relief I may be able to



afford to objects that, upon all accounts, I most heartily approve, lest some of different sentiments, but of equally unexceptionable characters, should partake of my benefactions with them.

But some tell us, that though an uniformity of sentiment is not to be expected, and every thing of that sort should be kept out of sight in a matter of charity, yet “ none should receive exhibitions from such a fund as this, but Ministers who have had a regular academical education.”

Do these Gentlemen mean only that such an institution as is here proposed should pay the first and most respectful attention to learned Ministers in their decline? This is certainly reasonable—such have had most expended upon their education in younger life—they have afterwards necessarily incurred peculiar expences—their education has



introduced them into more public and respectable connections—and probably to situations in which they have been more plentifully provided for while capable of service. —It may likewise be hoped that after enjoying peculiar advantages, such (*cæteris paribus*) have been better capable of explaining and defending divine truth in general, and the distinguishing principles of that body of Christians in particular with which they are more immediately connected. Therefore, if such talents have been usefully employed in younger life, they have peculiar claims on the benevolence and compassion of their brethren under the infirmities of old age.

But is the mere circumstance of a man's having been at an academy both a sufficient, and a *fine quâ non*, qualification for such a charity at this?

Allowing the importance of learning (in such branches at least as are more immediately in the line of their profession) to persons employed in this sacred office, we beg leave to submit it to the consideration of the candid and liberal, whether a man's real stock of solid and useful knowledge is not of more importance than the place or manner in which he acquired it. This thought reminds me of a motto I remember to have seen upon the arms of a worthy friend of mine in the country, "Non unde, sed Quis," which, however applicable to many other cases, is not quite foreign to this before us.

We are told of such a Minister recommended to this fund, he was in the academy at Northampton, or at Daventry, or at Warrington; or that he was at this or the other in the vicinity of London, or in that at Bristol, &c. And will that be sufficient to entitle him to esteem and encouragement?

Without intending the least reflection on either of those seminaries may we ask, what are we to infer from thence? He was so many years a student at —, and therefore—therefore what? therefore he is a man of learning? therefore he is a worthy character —? therefore he is an acceptable and useful preacher of the gospel —? If you can say that, you may add—therefore now, in his decline, he deserves the countenance and support of his brethren. Or, if that is his real character, why not ease the burdens of his old age, though he has been at neither. It is not a question with a wise and good man from whom—at what place—or in what way he obtained his knowledge, but what is it—what in its kind and degree—what in its tendency and effects? Has it appeared such as to qualify him for his public work?—But I feel ashamed to suppose of any man, that after having maintained his character to threescore years and ten, it should

to any seem expedient to enter upon such an enquiry. And, after all, how is satisfaction to be obtained? Is the good old man to be called up to be examined? He has not, perhaps, been five miles from home in so many years—he may be confined to his house, and probably to his chamber; you must then take your accounts of him from those who have long known him—who have been often in his company—attended on his ministrations, and are acquainted with his disposition and walk. If they, and Ministers of good repute around him, concur in bearing witness of him that he has through life approved himself an able and faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, who would think themselves authorized in refusing him the assistance of a benevolent institution of this nature, and reject him as necessarily illiterate and ignorant, because it does not appear that he was at this or that academy in younger life? especially if there be reason to believe that, feeling the

want of advantages from tutors, &c. by close thought and study, diligent reading, and an attention to examples and instructions in a more private way, he has successfully cultivated the gift of God that was in him, and appeared, both in and out of the pulpit, an ornament to his public character.

Upon the whole, it is submitted to the serious and candid of our several denominations, whether we cannot all unite in extending our beneficence to every Minister who would be included in a plan subject to the following restrictions.—When we say *all*, we would not be supposed to expect an absolutely universal concurrence. There is not that in the Widow's Fund, though a kind Providence has raised up so many and such generous friends to that institution, as to establish it on a most respectable and extensively useful foundation. And if, out of ten thousand of our body, four should with-



hold their assistance, shall the other fix desist, from an undertaking of this nature, because they cannot have the concurrence of the whole? Or if, in consequence thereof, instead of being able to assist an hundred Ministers, we can only exhibit to threescore, shall we do nothing for them because we cannot include all? But there is every reason to hope it would not want support, if founded and conducted in the true spirit of the gospel.

It is humbly apprehended that the following restrictions in the plan would secure its benefits to those to whom alone they could with propriety be extended.

If, *e. g.*

It admits none who are not, *bonâ fidē*, Dissenters from the Church of England, partly because such only are included in the very name and first principles of an institution of this sort; and partly because the national establishment provides for its own Ministers as long as they live.

All notoriously ignorant or immoral, though professed Dissenters, are excluded ; as being unworthy the name, as well as the office, of Christian Ministers, and consequently of all encouragement under that character.

That it be extended only to those who have been settled as Pastors in dissenting congregations ; because it is apprehended that satisfactory testimonials cannot be procured either of the abilities or moral characters of others.

Persons employed in any trades or employments of a worldly nature, seem improper objects, as it may be supposed that by their business they have made better provision for their families than Ministers solely dependent on the contributions of their people ; and such, when unfit for the public duties of the ministry, may not be deprived of all means of subsistence.

That no captious people may be induced hastily to dismiss their Minister on a presumption of being able to procure him an exhibition from this fund, they should know, that no application from themselves alone will secure it ; but the Minister must be the first to petition for it, and his case be properly attested by other Ministers known to be of respectable characters.

Left any Minister, on the other hand, should be tempted to solicit the charity when neither the state of his health, nor that of his worldly circumstances, require it ; the particulars of his case shall be certified both by his own people, and by such of his brethren in the ministry as are known and approved by the managers.

Apprehensive that some worthy Ministers, after having been many years in the service, sinking under a gradual decay, may

not, nevertheless, think themselves, nor be thought by their people, totally unfit for a part of the service, though they cannot then, as formerly, go through the whole ; both in tenderness to such, and for the satisfaction of their people, it may be thought expedient to grant such Ministers exhibitions from this fund, to enable them to procure assistance in their work, either stated or occasional.

Though it is hoped that the donations and subscriptions of the benevolent will enable the managers of this fund to grant exhibitions from it much more than in proportion to any thing which the circumstances of many Ministers will enable them to do towards its support ; yet, for divers reasons, it is thought expedient, that every Minister shall contribute more or less to the fund, before he be allowed to receive any exhibition from it.

And for as much as it is apprehended that some Ministers, in less indigent circumstances,

may be inclined either to advance such sums at once, or to subscribe so much annually to the fund as shall entitle them to comfortable annuities for life ; it is proposed that security be given by the managers \* for granting annuities to such Ministers, in proportion to their respective subscriptions, agreeable to the calculations on which such annuities are usually settled.

Other hints have occurred ; but they are suppressed here, that this first essay upon the subject may not be swelled to a size that should discourage its circulation. I shall now only  
recite

\* To secure this and all the other important ends of the institution, it will certainly be thought expedient to commit the management of it to a sufficient number of Ministers and Lay Gentlemen of the most respectable characters, and of all the three denominations ; in whom, as united in one common cause, the whole body may cheerfully confide for an impartial direction of its various interests, according to regulations agreed upon by the Society at their annual meetings.



recite, in as few words as possible, some of the important ends proposed in the institution recommended.

It is more immediately intended to afford seasonable assistance to Ministers of worthy characters in compassionate circumstances.

Such Ministers and their families would hereby, in some measure, be relieved from painful burdens already felt, and discouraging apprehensions for the future, under which many of them are labouring for want of such aid, to a degree truly compassionate.

It is also wished, that by these means their last days and services may be rendered not only more comfortable to themselves but likewise more useful to others.

That their appearance at that period may do honour to the respectable body of which they have been long worthy and useful members and ministers.

And, in fine, that their several congregations, and the interest of religion in them, may be honourably supported, and the Cause and Kingdom of Christ more effectually and extensively advanced,

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